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Letter from Governor Blanco To President Bush

September 2, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

Let me first thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented natural disaster. Your pledge of assistance for the initial and long-term recovery efforts is reflective of the tremendous outpouring of support by the citizens of our great country. Although we have been dealt a devastating blow, I can assure you Louisiana will recover, rebuild, and restore our communities.

Based on our initial assessment, I have previously requested significant federal support to include: an additional 40,000 troops; trailers of water, ice and food; commercial buses; base camps; staging areas; amphibious personnel carriers; deployable morgues; urban search and rescue teams; airlift; temporary housing; and communications systems. Even if these initial requests had been fully honored, these assets would not be sufficient to address our critical, immediate needs. Additional assistance requirements for the federal government are outlined below. As we continue to assess our needs, I will ensure you receive our updated requirements.

I request the expeditious return of the Headquarters of the 256th Brigade Combat Team as they have completed their mission in the Iraqi theatre of operations and they are urgently needed here at home. I request that you remission this unit to Louisiana where they will become part of the recovery efforts in their home state. As the remainder of the Brigade returns, I request that they be missioned by the Department of Defense to assist civil authorities in Hurricane Katrina recovery operations in Louisiana.

To increase the responsiveness of our humanitarian relief operations, FEMA should establish a second Operational Staging Base (OSB) in Baton Rouge. Currently we have only one OSB in Pineville. Establishment of a second OSB will cut in half the response time to our most affected parishes. This will raise our local distribution points from 21 to 35, significantly increasing our support to the neediest citizens. Our current requirement for water, ice and MREs is 100 trucks of each per day; our requirement will increase to 200 trucks of each per day when we increase local distribution points.

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Our communications grid was devastated and we need significant assistance in restoring governmental communications. The reestablishment of cell phone coverage and public safety networks is necessary to establish communications among governmental officials at all levels and among response agencies. The radio system that is currently operational in the greater New Orleans area was designed to support 800 users; there are currently 2500 users. To address the radio communications requirements, we need additional frequencies: 25 800-MHz trunking repeaters, tower crews, 1000 portable radios, three hundred-foot tower trailers, and additional BellSouth and Motorola staff. I also require additional staffed mobile command centers that provide satellite uplink to support additional voice and data needs at public safety and governmental sites.

I want aerial and ground firefighting support to address the growing danger of fire. This support should include both equipment and trained personnel.

A critical element of our military response is equipment, particularly vehicles. As military units are flown in to assist us in our recovery efforts, I request a fleet of military vehicles that will remain in the affected areas. Therefore, I am requesting access to military trucks, HMMWVs and other vehicles. Fort Polk, Louisiana, has a prepositioned fleet of military vehicles that could be accessed very quickly; however, there may be other sources that may be available quicker.

I request 175 generators to enable the parishes to provide electricity for critical local operations and state offices to better support affected citizens. As I review this requirement with our parishes, this number will undoubtedly increase. I need additional diesel fuel supplies.

Preventative health is a priority to prevent the spread of disease. Our state medical team is currently assessing these requirements; I need considerable personnel, equipment, drugs, vaccines and other medical supplies.

We have experienced a significant loss of life and as we transition from our initial emphasis on search and rescue, we require assistance with mortuary affairs. It is my pledge to the citizens of Louisiana that we will conduct this task with as much dignity as possible; to accomplish this I need federal assets to work closely with state and local officials.

Livestock and other animals were also victims of this tragic storm. I need assistance to deal with injured animals and also with animal remains.

Mr. President, only your personal involvement will ensure the immediate delivery of federal assets needed to save lives that are in jeopardy hour by hour. I know you will take the actions necessary to make this happen. As the recovery efforts continue, I will provide you a reassessment of needs. Again, thank you for your support of the citizens of Louisiana.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Governor
State of Louisiana